STATEMENT TO PARLIAMENT

BY

MINISTER OF HEALTH AND WELLNESS

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NATIONAL COVID-19 DEPLOYMENT AND VACCINATION INTERIM PLAN 2021

TUESDAY, JANUARY 19, 2021

Madam Speaker, I rise to update this honourable house and the people of Jamaica on the National COVID-19 Deployment and Vaccination Interim Plan.

The Cabinet has approved a National COVID-19 Deployment and Vaccination Interim Plan as the strategy and authority on the deployment of COVID-19 Vaccine(s) in Jamaica. The Plan outlines the overall strategies for the deployment, implementation and monitoring of the COVID-19 vaccine(s) in country. The Plan is developed in a way that ensures alignment and integration with the national COVID-19 Response and Recovery programme.

Madam Speaker, the question may be asked why an interim plan? The COVID-19 pandemic is a very dynamic and fluid situation with continuous learning and new information being brought forth as to the clinical and epidemiological features of the virus and its transmission. Additionally, on the matter of the development of COVID-19 vaccines, there is still some uncertainty in this area, such as the type and quantity of vaccine(s) which may become available to Jamaica. Accordingly, this Plan is developed based on information which is currently available and the assumptions the Government is able to make based on these currently available information. There will be future updates to the Plan as new information becomes available.

VACCINE DEVELOPMENT PROCESS AND STATUS OF VACCINES UNDER DEVELOPMENT

Madam Speaker before going into the details of the National COVID-19 Deployment and Vaccination Interim Plan, I wish to remind the honourable house on the Vaccine Development Process and the status of vaccines under development globally.

Madam Speaker, in order to ensure that the new vaccines being developed to combat the COVID-19 Virus are safe and effective, the vaccine development process, as prescribed by the WHO, involved:

a) ***Preclinical Testing***: Each vaccine under development must first undergo screenings and evaluations to determine which antigen should be used to invoke an immune response. This preclinical phase is done without testing on humans.
b) ***Phase 1 Safety Trials***: Scientists give the vaccine to a small number of people to test safety and dosage, as well as to confirm that it stimulates an immune response.
c) ***Phase 2 Expanded Trials***: Scientists give the vaccine to hundreds of people split into groups, such as children and the elderly, to see if the vaccine acts differently in them. These trials further test the vaccine's safety and ability to generate an immune response.
d) ***Phase 3 Efficacy Trials***: Scientists give the vaccine to thousands of people and wait to see how many become infected, compared with volunteers who received a placebo.
e) ***Approval:*** Regulators review the complete trial results and plans for a vaccine's manufacturing, and decide whether to give it full approval. A vaccine must be proven to be safe and effective across a broad population before it will be approved and introduced into a national immunization programme. The bar for vaccine safety and efficacy is extremely high, recognizing that vaccines are given to people who are otherwise healthy and specifically free from the illness.

Madam Speaker as of January 15, 2021 there are seventy-seven (77) COVID-19 Vaccines under development with eight (8) have been granted emergency use approval in one or more countries.

The eight vaccines which have been granted emergency use approval in at least one country are:

i. BioNTech/Pfizer (48 countries)
ii. Moderna (34 countries)
iii. Gamaleya (4 countries)
iv. Oxford/AstraZeneca (5 countries)
v. Serum Institute of India, Covishield (1 country)
vi. Bharat Biotech, Covaxin (1 country)
vii. Sinopharm, BBIBP-CorV (5 countries)
viii. Sinovac, CoronaVac (3 countries)

OVERVIEW NATIONAL COVID-19 DEPLOYMENT AND VACCINATION INTERIM PLAN 2021

Madam Speaker, I will now provide an overview of the contents of the National COVID-19 Deployment and Vaccination Interim Plan.

The National COVID-19 Deployment and Vaccination Interim Plan, 2021 covers inter alia:

- ✓ Planning and Coordination Of Vaccine Introduction
- ✓ Legal and Regulatory Framework
- ✓ Phased Approach of COVID-19 Vaccination Introduction In Jamaica
- ✓ Target Populations and Vaccination Delivery Strategies

- ✓ Human Resources Management and Training
- ✓ Supply Chain Management
- ✓ Risk Assessment and Mitigation Strategies
- ✓ Vaccine Programme Communication
- ✓ Vaccine Safety Monitoring
- ✓ COVID-19 Vaccine Programme Monitoring and Evaluation

Governance Structure

Madam Speaker, a multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder governance structure has been established to lead the coordination and deployment of the COVID-19 Vaccine. This structure includes the previously announces establishment of a National Vaccine Commission to provide strategic and technical oversight to development and implementation of a National Deployment and Vaccination Plan for the introduction of COVID-19 Vaccines in Jamaica.

A National Coordinating Committee (NCC) has also been established to design, plan and provide leadership to the field on all activities related to the vaccine introduction. The NCC will guide the priority actions and engage in on-going risk assessment so as to ensure that the plan remains relevant. The NCC will be supported by four sub committees, the Parish Medical Officers of Health and the parish Expanded Programme on Immunization (EPI) Coordinators. The NCC will have responsibility for providing updates on the on-going assessment of the safety, immunogenicity, efficacy and duration of protection of candidate vaccine(s).

National Regulatory Authority and Regulatory Approval Pathway

Madame Speaker, the plan set out the proposed Regulatory Approval Pathway for the emergency authorisation of COVID-19 Vaccines for use in Jamaica. The National

Regulatory Authority which will be responsible for overseeing the licensing and use of COVID-19 Vaccines will be the Standards and Regulation Division of the Ministry of Health and Wellness.

The Standards and Regulation Division has developed an Emergency Approval Regulatory process for COVID 19 Vaccines. This process will include:

i. the granting of an Emergency Use Authorisation for COVID-19 Vaccines to be used in Jamaica; and
ii. the adoption of the approach taken by the Caribbean Regulatory System (CRS) of the Caribbean Public Health Agency (CARPHA) in evaluating and assessing COVID-19 Vaccines for emergency use approval, by relying on vaccine approval by the WHO and some stringent regulatory authorities namely the US FDA, Health Canada and the European Medicines Agency (EMA).

We have also outlined in the Plan, the application process and documentation requirements for applying for Emergency Use Authorization.

Phased Introduction and Deployment of COVID-19 Vaccine

Madam Speaker, as indicated in my update to the House last week, there will a phased introduction and deployment of COVID-19 Vaccine in Jamaica. Four (4) phases for the introduction of COVID-19 Vaccine is proposed. These phases are:

- Phase 1 – Vulnerable and priority groups
- Phase 2 – Other Priority groups and the introduction of vaccine to the general public
- Phases 3 and 4 - More of the general population will have access to the vaccine

In Phase 1, 16 percent of the population is targeted to be vaccinated with the supply of vaccines to be obtained through the COVAX Facility.

Madam Speaker, it is our intention to continuously seek out supplies of vaccines to ensure as many Jamaicans as possible, at any given time can be protected. We will seek additional doses of the vaccines based on locally relevant risk factors, vulnerabilities and the COVID-19 threat. The initial projection for the second Phase is a further 16 percent of the population

Based on whether there is a continued threat of COVID-19 Madam Speaker, Jamaica will enter into this phase which may be ongoing and will be determined by the need for revaccination and/or the level of immunity achieved or needed by the population. This phase may see the vaccine becoming a part of routine immunization schedules and procurements will be absorbed into the regular budget for immunizations. This will have to be expanded based on demand and availability of funds.

Madam Speaker, I have also given instructions to the National Health Fund to survey the market for other options, including other private partners, with a view to purchasing these vaccines and making them available to the population. This is in order to ensure that we

Vaccine Acceptance and Uptake (Demand) and Communication

Madam Speaker, acceptance and uptake for the approved COVID-19 vaccine in Jamaica is critical to slowing the spread of the infection, reducing morbidity and mortality as well as rebuilding the economy. We know however, Madam Speaker that introducing a new vaccine especially through new deliver methods may be challenging due to public mistrust and misinformation. As such Madam Speaker, the Ministry will be undertaking a national level advocacy encouraging citizens to vaccinate against COVID-19. A robust public education and sensitization campaign will be implemented by the Ministry aimed at increasing acceptance and uptake of the vaccine. The purpose of the public education and sensitization campaign Madam Speaker, is to foster trust of the vaccine, dispel myths

and misinformation, provide factual and accurate information about vaccination and gain public input in the vaccination strategies to be employed.

Supply Chain Management

Madam Speaker, supply chain readiness is key to efficiently deploying COVID-19 vaccines to the target populations. It is expected that the COVID-19 vaccine will arrive in Jamaica via air utilizing the transport system in place from the manufacturer to countries participating in the COVAX / PAHO Revolving Fund Facility. Once in Jamaica, vaccines due to their fragility (temperature sensitivity), are given special status by both the MOHW personnel and the customs officers at the airport. This allows for timely clearance and transport to the central stores where they are checked by the Programme Officer and National Health Fund warehouse staff to ascertain their condition.

Madam Speaker, current cold chain capacity at the central and peripheral (parish) levels is limited. Given the anticipated overall increase in the number of vaccines (approximately 1,000,000) additional storage capacity will be required. Each parish will need at least one additional vaccine fridge to accommodate the COVID-19 vaccine. At the central stores an additional 10-20 freezers are needed.

FINANCING OF PHASE 1 OF THE NATIONAL COVID-19 VACCINE DEPLOYMENT AND VACCINATION INTERIM PLAN

Madam Speaker, the budget required to support the first phase is $3 Billion. This covers, among other things, the purchase of the Vaccine(s), supply chain and cold storage items, PPEs, transportation, staff training, staff costs, and public education and sensitization costs.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry has already commenced its preparation activities for the introduction of COVID-19 Vaccines in Jamaica for the timely and smooth implementation of COVID-19 Vaccines when they become to Jamaica.

Madam Speaker, the Ministry is taking all the necessary steps to ensure that safe and effective vaccines are deployed though the continued monitoring of developments relating to COVID-19 Vaccines, obtaining the guidance of the World Health Organisations Strategic Advisory Group of Experts on Immunization (SAGE), the Pan American Health Organizations (PAHO) Technical Advisory Group (TAG), and gathering data to make informed evidence based decisions to fulfil our mandate of protecting the public's health.

Madam Speaker, the Government has confidence in this interim plan, as we seek to protect the Jamaican population. Thank you.